



Who are you, *really*?

Your friends and family might know who you are. Even your teachers and school counselors, and administrators might have gotten to know you pretty well over the last few years. However, the colleges you're applying to don't have a clue! Before you get intimidated by that, understand that this is the exact purpose of every facet of the college application. What you do or don't say, and how you say it, will help some very skilled application readers quickly understand what makes you unique and whether you're going to be a good fit for their university.

This is why authenticity matters. I mean, sure, there's a place for faking it until you make it. But that can only take you so far. Sometimes we rise to the occasion, but other times it just won't pass the vibe check. And catfishing a college is an expensive mistake.

So approach this journey with an open mind. Think about why you want to go to college in the first place. It's often said that college is more of a match to be made and not a prize to be won. Sometimes that's hard to conceptualize in a teenage mind. But I'm pretty sure you want to win at life and not just at college applications. If you focus your goal on "winning" colleges, that's where your success could stop. Rather, focusing on the long term tends to bring a lot of small wins along the way. Your education is a tool in the journey of building the life you want for yourself, and maybe even the future you want for the world. Going to a college that's a great fit for you will truly enhance that.

So are you ready to get started?

There's no format to this. You can hand-write your responses or type them. I'll make the prompts pastable for those who prefer to type them. Don't overthink formatting beyond readability. No need for complete sentences here. Bullet points and lists work well. Make notes of time frames whenever possible.

"Do I add that too?" If you're in doubt whether something is "important enough" to add, add it anyway. At the very least, more information keeps the process afloat and helps you organize your thoughts.

Clubs (in and out of school)

Sports (in and out of school)

Honor societies

Academic awards

Sports awards

Volunteer history

MUSIC OR ARTISTIC TALENTS

Other CAS activities (if you're an IB student)

Religious involvement

Family obligations

Paid jobs of any kind

Internships

Things, projects, and crafts you've created, made, or started

And then there's the hypothetical things to ponder when you start exploring essays...

What things make you happy?

What kind of life do you envision for yourself as an adult?

What kind of things are on your "bucket list"?

What do you think your most valuable traits are?

What do you feel is most important for people to know about you?

What are some of your top values?

What experiences do you most hope for in college?

What were some of your favorite things in high school?

What kinds of things do you look forward to as you get older?